

Iowa Outdoors
Iowa Department of Natural Resources
www.iowadnr.com

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ICE FISHING ENTHUSIASTS WELCOME COLD SNAP

DES MOINES – Cold weather has finally found Iowa and anxious ice anglers need to use caution as they head to lakes this weekend. Ice conditions have been poor for the southern two-thirds of the state, but the recent cold snap should improve ice quality.

“I expect a major increase in the ice fishing activity this weekend,” said Rod Slings, recreational safety program supervisor for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR). “Anglers need to treat this ice like they would if it was in early December. Cut a lot of test holes and check the thickness. Don’t go alone and avoid areas on the ice with a lot of snow cover.”

Snow acts as an insulator and slows ice growth. Ice thickness is not uniform on any body of water, and should be approached with caution.

“I know most of us who enjoy ice fishing have been chomping at the bit to get out without driving two hours, but we can’t let our enthusiasm get in the way of good judgement,” Slings said.

As a rule of thumb, the DNR advises at least four inches of clear ice for general fishing activity.

For more information, contact Slings at 515-281-8652.

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2003 HUNTING, FISHING LICENSES EXPIRE JAN. 10

DES MOINES – Hunters and anglers are reminded to purchase their 2004 licenses soon. The 2003 hunting and fishing licenses expire on Jan. 10. A resident season fishing license costs \$17.50. A resident season hunting license costs \$17.50 and the habitat fee is \$8.50.

There are still 11 counties with permits available for the Jan. 11 to 19 special late antlerless deer only season. Most counties with permits available are in southern Iowa. To find out which counties have permits available, go to www.iowadnr.com and click on the wildlife link, then on the Iowa Resident Antlerless Licenses Remaining link.

Hunters may purchase as many antlerless deer permits as they want for the special late season as long as the quota for the county is not filled. Hunters will need a 2004 hunting license and pay the habitat fee to hunt in the special late antlerless season.

“This is a good opportunity to meet a farmer who needs some deer taken from their land this season, but is also an opportunity to find some new areas to hunt for next fall,” said Terry Little, wildlife research supervisor for the DNR. “But it is up to the hunter to do the legwork and find landowners who want does harvested.”

Little said hunters should avoid shooting a deer traveling by itself because there is a chance that it is either a young buck or a buck that has shed its antlers. “We advise hunters who want to shoot a doe to select an antlerless deer from a group because does tend to travel together,” he said.

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TREES AND SHRUBS VITAL TO WILDLIFE WINTER SURVIVAL

DES MOINES - With the typical Iowa winter of subzero temperatures and strong northerly winds, the benefits of trees and woody shrubs to wildlife and songbirds can not be overemphasized, according to John Walkowiak, forestry bureau chief for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

Trees, especially conifers, provide critical winter cover for many of Iowa's game and non-game species. If densely planted, conifer trees act as “Wildlife Hotels” by greatly reducing wind chill temperatures and allowing wildlife to conserve their body heat. In addition, conifers allow wildlife cover to hide from predators. Conifers ideally suited to Iowa's growing conditions are red cedar, white pine, red pine, jack pine, Norway spruce and white spruce.

Broadleaf shrubs and small trees with dense low hanging branches also provide winter cover for wildlife and provide winter food sources. Shrubs and small trees such as serviceberry, the dogwoods, chokecherry, wild plum, elderberry, arrowwood, nannyberry, buttonbush and highbush cranberry are excellent choices for Iowa wildlife. As the snow becomes deeper and blows into drifts, upright woody vegetation continues to provide winter food, browse, and cover which is often critical to wildlife winter survival.

To provide winter cover in future years, trees and shrub species can be planted this spring. The Iowa Department of Natural Resources State Forest Nursery sells trees and shrubs for wildlife plantings. The price is \$0.25 to \$0.45 per seedling with a minimum order of 500 seedlings. For smaller scale plantings, the 20 seedling songbird packet is available at \$20 and various 200 seedling wildlife habitat packets are available at \$90. To order seedlings or for more information, call the nursery at 1-800-865-2477 or connect to www.iowatreeplanting.com.

If you have an area of open land, consider a tree and shrub planting to help Iowa's wildlife species.

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BALD EAGLE WATCHING

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

It's hard to beat the view from Scott Gritters' office these days. "I can probably see 15 eagles swirling around below the locks right now," said Gritters, fisheries biologist for the Department of Natural Resources at Guttenberg. "This is the best eagle viewing we have had in quite a while."

Of course, his office in the Guttenberg Hatchery overlooks the lock and dam. But this week's cold snap and blanket of snow are creating prime bald eagle watching on the Mississippi River and other open water areas across the Midwest. Eagles, migrating from northern states and Canada, are drawn to open water and the fish they hold. Even during the most bitter cold, the lock and dam system keeps Mississippi tailwaters open. "Right now, the shad are dying," observes Gritters. "It's most likely the temperature shock; water going from relatively water to frigid. The eagles are really hammering them."

Large trees, in undisturbed stretches along the Mississippi, provide nighttime roosts and daytime perches for the magnificent birds. And each year, more eagles are seen along smaller, interior streams and reservoirs. With just a few effortless wing-beats, they circle an area. Listen closely—from a distance—and you can hear the calls and whistles as they 'talk'. Most exciting, though, is when one tightens that circle, drops to the surface and snatches a fish in its talons. With the added weight, more slow circling is needed to build altitude. Then it's back to that perching tree for dinner.

A rarity just a couple decades ago, eagles have staked out a claim as a top attraction outside when the cold sends most of us *inside*. The strong population increase also means a relatively short drive time to take in this ‘must see’ outdoor show. And there is plenty of eagle watching in January---serious and recreational.

Through January 15, observers count them as part of the Midwest Bald Eagle Survey. This winter, January 9 and 10 are the primary count days. “We have 55 standardized routes that are run each year,” explains biologist Bruce Ehresman, from the DNR’s wildlife diversity program. “We also get reports outside the routes. For instance, one year, we had 100 eagles on Lily Lake, near Amana. We knew that was not near one of the current routes. We try not to duplicate anything.”

The midwinter surveys yielded a high of 2,493 eagles in 2001. The number had climbed steadily, until a 2003 dip to 1,832. Mild weather, spreading out the birds, might have been to blame. “I don’t know what to expect for this year,” Ehresman admits, “(Before the weekend storm) the birds had been widely dispersed. On the other hand, cold weather to the north had pushed some of their winter eagles our way.” Coordinated now by the United States Geological Survey, the bald eagle survey was initiated by the Audubon Society in the 1960s, as a way to gauge the comeback of the eagle from near extinction in the continental U.S.

Pesticide poisoning and loss of habitat sent bald eagle numbers plummeting in the 1940s and ‘50s. A groundswell of support, a partial precursor to the modern environmental movement, followed. DDT was banned. Landowners and conservationists worked to hold on to or improve eagle habitat. Legislation ranging from the Bald Eagle Recovery Act to the Endangered Species Act followed. In 1995, the status of our nation’s symbol was upgraded from ‘endangered’ to ‘threatened’ in the Lower 48. As the rebound continues, biologists recommend that it be upgraded again, to ‘of special concern’. Strict protections would still remain.

“The comeback of the eagle is far beyond what we had hoped,” admits Ehresman. “Numbers are still increasing. It’s not leveling off, yet. It is important to keep track of areas of concentration.”

For now, that’s not too hard. And it makes a great cold-weather outing, too.

Bald Eagle Watches Around Iowa

From mid-January through early March, bald eagle ‘watches’ and other events are prominent throughout central and eastern Iowa. Keokuk marks its Bald Eagle Appreciation Days 20th anniversary this winter. Guttenberg, Dubuque, Bellevue, the Quad Cities and Red Rock and Saylorville reservoirs are among other community wide events. A call to your county conservation department will tell you where and when the closest Eagle Days are.

“People really get excited about viewing eagles,” points out Connie Backes, with the Guttenberg Civic and Commerce Club. It’s January 17-18 weekend is typical of the other communities’ offerings; an indoor programs, including ‘up close’ looks at eagles from the University of Minnesota Raptor program. Spotting scopes are available in the riverfront park. “Living here, it’s something you kind of take for granted,” admits Backes. “But people call, asking if we have eagles. They come and watch them. They are in awe of the eagles.” For more information, call 877-252-2323.

Hunting ‘Year’ Ends. 2004 licenses needed.

With the January 10 close of Iowa’s pheasant and traditional deer seasons, 2003 hunting and fishing licenses expire. Hunters pursuing late winter game, as well as cold weather anglers will need to purchase their ’04 license and corresponding stamps. Iowa’s electronic license outlets have been selling the 2004 privileges since December 15.

There is one more deer season. However, that window of opportunity is a narrow one. Iowa’s ‘special late season’ is January 11-19....*if county by county antlerless tags remain*. As of Tuesday, January 6, only 11 counties—mostly across southern Iowa--had fewer than 2600 total tags available. Strong sales during the traditional deer seasons claimed most of the 30,000 additional antlerless licenses.

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IOWA FISHING REPORT

For the week of January 6, 2004

www.iowadnr.com

Ice conditions vary greatly across the state. For current information on fishing conditions for your lake or area, contact the office in that district. Phone numbers are listed with each district report.

Northeast

Mississippi River Pools 9 to 15: The ice fishing catch has slowed, but some fish are still being taken in Pools 9-11 on the Mississippi River. Anglers are still urged to use caution; however, ice conditions are somewhat better than in previous weeks. Most places have 6 to 7 inches of ice. Watch out for areas with current, as there will be less ice, and do not cross any areas if you are uncertain. For Pool 9, on the Wisconsin side, there are good reports of bluegills being caught in the **Black Hawk Bottoms**. **Conway Lake** and **Village Creek** are producing some nice bluegills and pumpkinseed. For Pool 10, **Martelle**, **Joyce** and **Mud Hen** areas, near Harpers Ferry, have been producing some crappies, bass and nice sized bluegills. Tip-ups are producing some nice bass, but the northern pike bite is slow. Bluegills, bass and yellow perch are biting at **Bussey Lake** at Guttenberg, but size is generally small. In Pool 11, fish are being caught in **Swift**

Slough, but they are also running on the small side. Ice fishing is still questionable on Pools 12-15 on the Mississippi River. Later in the week ice conditions should be more favorable. As of Monday (Jan. 5) there is still a lot of open water.

Lake Delhi (Delaware): Bluegill fishing is good on jigs tipped with a wax worm. White bass and largemouth bass fishing is fair on jigs tipped with a minnow.

Delaware and Buchanan County farm ponds are producing nice catches of bluegills on jigs tipped with a wax worm. Crappie fishing is good on jigs tipped with a minnow.

For information on fishing in northeast Iowa, call the regional office in Manchester at (563) 927-3276.

Northwest

Spirit Lake (Dickinson): Anglers are catching walleyes on the east side of the lake using jigs and jigging raps. A few yellow perch are being caught on the west side at Buffalo Run, and on the east side off Stoney Point using jigs with wigglers and wax worms. Anglers are catching lots of bluegills at Angler's Bay and a few at Buffalo Run.

West Okoboji (Dickinson): Anglers fishing for bluegills and crappie should fish the Miller's Bay area in 10 to 12 feet of water. Fish along the weed lines using teardrops tipped with wigglers or wax worms. Emerson Bay and Smith's Bay are other areas to try. Yellow perch are being caught in Miller's Bay and Emerson Bay. Some 20 to 27-inch northern pike are being caught on chubs in Miller's Bay.

Silver Lake (Palo Alto): Yellow perch fishing has been spotty. Some sorting is required for larger fish.

Brushy Creek (Webster): Ice conditions are improving this week at Brushy Creek. Anglers are catching a few bluegills, crappies and walleyes.

Clear Lake (Cerro Gordo): Clear Lake has 6 to 12 inches of ice. Caution should be used if fishing around the aeration systems. Yellow bass fishing is spotty. Yellows are being caught in the west end of the lake, between the Baptist Camp and Farmers Beach in 8 to 10 feet of water. Use minnows and cut bait on jigging spoons for the best action. Try different spots until fish are located. Walleye fishing has been slow. Fish from sunset into the early evening for the best action.

Rice Lake (Winnebago, Worth): Yellow perch are hitting minnows and small jigs. The perch are small, so sorting is required.

For more information on fishing in northwest Iowa, call the regional office in Spirit Lake at (712) 336-1840.

Southwest

As of Jan. 2, ice conditions are considered to be unsafe in the southwest region.

For more information on fishing in southwest Iowa, contact the regional office in Lewis at (712) 769-2587.

Southeast

With the recent cold weather, new ice will be forming this week on the Mississippi River backwaters - Pools 16 to 19. Anglers are advised to use caution when venturing out onto new ice. The insulating effect of snow may make many areas unsafe for fishing.

Lake Odessa (Louisa): Unsafe ice.

Lake Geode (Henry): Little to no ice.

Lake Darling (Washington): One inch of rotten ice.

Lake Rathbun (Appanoose): Unsafe ice conditions. Strong winds are keeping the lake open.

Lake Wapello (Davis): Unsafe ice conditions.

Lake Miami (Monroe): Unsafe ice conditions.

Lake Sugema (Van Buren): Unsafe ice conditions.

Lake Macbride (Johnson): Ice conditions are variable throughout the lake, with open water near the dam. Use caution and test ice regularly. Some anglers have been fishing north of the power lines along the one-way road. Fishing has been slow, a few crappies have been caught and some bluegills on ice flies tipped with wax worms and minnows.

Pleasant Creek (Poweshiek): Variable ice conditions; caution is advised. Fishing has been slow. Anglers are catching a few small bluegills, a few crappies and a few yellow perch.

Coralville Reservoir (Johnson): Ice conditions were still poor late last week, with open water on the upper end and near Mehaffey Bridge.

Farm Ponds and Small Ponds: Use caution and check ice regularly. Ice is marginal – some ponds have decent ice (caution is advised) while others have open water around the edges with poor ice conditions. Colder temperatures are forecasted for the rest of the week and this should help freeze up some of the lakes and ponds.

For more information on fishing in southeast Iowa, call the regional office in Brighton at (319) 694-2430.

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